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NEPAL

SUCCESS STORY

Increasing Government Accountability through Radio



A radio journalist facilitates a discussion about government service delivery in Morang.



A radio journalist collects comments about government services to relay to officials.

March 2009 – Citizen expectations are high in Nepal following last year's elections, as people are looking for government to provide customary public services. However, during the 10 years of conflict preceding the elections, many district and village government bodies throughout the country were unable to deliver effective services and have only begun to undertake this work.

In this environment of heightened expectations, radio has emerged as a quick and effective way to reach communities. To help district and village governments connect with citizens, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives partnered with four radio stations in the eastern and central Terai to develop a new interactive program. Its aim is to provide—for the first time—a forum where local government officials can discuss pressing issues with the public.

Each station was provided equipment, including a toll-free phone line, to establish a weekly, live call-in show that allows citizens to ask questions or make suggestions directly to their local government representatives. Through the weekly shows, citizens have been able to express grievances that, in all likelihood, would not have been heard otherwise, and in many cases, officials have been able to clarify misunderstandings about complex processes, such as land registration.

The shows have quickly proven effective in involving communities and resolving issues. For example, when the Saptakoshi River overflowed its banks on August 18, 2008, local government and disaster relief officials used the radio platform to channel information to flood victims in Sunsari District. The program also helped the district's public health officer to effectively inform displaced people of the government's relief efforts.

In Morang District, callers told the agricultural development officer that government-subsidized fertilizer shipments were not reaching the intended beneficiaries. His office quickly addressed the situation and reported to the station that the problem had been resolved. The radio platform was also used by the district election officer and his staff to answer questions about the upcoming by-election and to introduce a new electronic voting system.

Overall, the project is helping to manage expectations, as citizens feel officials are listening, and improve accountability, as officials know citizens are watching.